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## Fearful and Hesitant Modern Men in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' 1917

Asst. Instructor Asma Jasim Muhammad

University of Sulymaniyah, College of Languages

[Hyouisif@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Hyouisif@tu.edu.iq)

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### Abstract:

This paper is devoted to Eliot's poetic critique of modern humanity in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' which is one of the significant poems written by Eliot in 1911 because of its new modern style and the techniques that the poet adopted from various sources. It concentrates on how Eliot criticises modern humanity for instance, anti-heroism, secularism, and alienation. In addition, the study will take into account the illumination on how the current society has over emphasized on the issue of Michelangelo. This is a remarkable presentation of how Prufrock views the modern people and modern life as a hell similar to Dante's Inferno where man cannot express his feelings or doing anything to redeem himself.

الخوف والتردد عن الإنسان المعاصر

في " أغنية حب ج. ألفريد بروفروك 1917 "

م.م. أسماء جاسم محمد , جامعة السليمانية

### الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا البحث نقد إليوت للإنسان المعاصر في " أغنية حب ج. ألفريد بروفروك " وهي واحدة من القصائد المهمة التي كتبها إليوت في عام 1911 بسبب أسلوبها الحديث الجديد والتقنيات التي اعتمدها الشاعر من مصادر مختلفة. ينتقد إليوت الإنسان المعاصر من خلال استخدام " المعادل موضوعي ". يركز البحث على بعض الجوانب التي اتقدها إليوت في الإنسان المعاصر , على سبيل المثال , معاداة البطولة والعلمانية والغربة. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك , سوف يسلط الضوء على كيفية رؤية إليوت للإنسان المعاصر والحياة المعاصرة كجيم أشبه بجحيم دانتي حيث يقف الإنسان عاجزا عن التعبير عن نفسه أو فعل أي شيء حيال ذلك. الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الحديث , بروفروك , البطل السلبي , التردد , الدنيوية والإغتراب

### **Eliot's Prufrock**

This study analyses the character of modern humans in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. This is with regard to Guido from the epigraph of the poem and Prufrock, the protagonist of the poem. He mainly represents irreligious and fearful modern humans. Furthermore, Robert White in an article entitled, 'Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock's, Epigraph', confirms the similarity between the situation of Guido and Prufrock, (White 3). Eliot presents modern humanity in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as anti-heroic, isolated, irreligious and secular. The epigraph of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is very significant. Eliot has chosen that particular epigraph from Dante's 'Inferno' (hell), and it is strongly related to the content of the poem due to the similarity of the setting and situation of Guido, Prufrock and modern humans. It is essential to look at the significance of certain lines of the poem which show the negative impact of technology in the modern world and what technology and industry made people especially those who live in the cities. In addition, Prufrock, a middle-aged man, is quite afraid of expressing his hidden wishes and desires in the form of monologue, which was used by Robert Browning in the nineteenth century. This is significant because Browning through the monologue technique could gain fame in the nineteenth century and he was a pioneer in using that

technique in the nineteenth century in 'My Last Duchess'. Manju Jain points out that the plight of Prufrock is also identical to that of Laforgue's personae in a similar way that Prufrock longs for love affairs, yet he mocks at his wishes and desires. This is because he is entangled in a world where these wishes and aspirations are only made fun of, (White 38).

Manju Jain (1991:35) asserts that Eliot is quite similar to Browning because Browning revised the 'romantic lyric' and Eliot revised the dramatic monologue in a way he was even called the 'Browning of the twentieth century.' In Eliot's poetry it is always difficult to differentiate between the doer of the action and the object. Everything appears to tell about the consciousness of Prufrock or other characters of Eliot's poems, "Gerontion" is an example. As a result, it is challenging to stipulate the time, place and the individual 'to whom the persona speaks', (Jain 35-36).

Eliot had composed 'The Love Song' over the period 1909-1911, and he finished it in Munich, Germany, (Raffel 24). In the poem modern human beings are considered fearful of confronting the reality of life and as anti-heroic with certain hidden wishes and fears. Hollahan Eugene takes the view that Prufrock has decided not to participate actively in life which may require hardship and torment. By referring to Hamlet, it becomes very clear that 'he is not heroic, creative, risk taking or religiously committed', (Eugene 91). Prufrock who represents modern humans, states that he is neither Hamlet who was a tragic hero, nor was meant to be, but he is rather an attendant lord, which may indicate Horatio:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do, (ll. 111-12).

This will encourage readers to identify Prufrock's identity and think of their own identities simultaneously. Prufrock does not have courage to do anything as that courage is based on the nature of the person like Hamlet, Lazarus, John the Baptist, or Michelangelo, (Eugene 45). His lack of courage is perhaps due to his other part of the human body which always works as the ego or the super-ego of human beings. Margaret L. Andersen and Howard F. Taylor argue that Freud has divided human psyche into three parts: 'the id, the superego and the ego' the 'id' comprises profound 'drives and impulses'. Freud was especially fascinated by the sensual element of the 'id' which he thought as vigour in the mind which is not conscious. The super-ego is

that division of the human self which embodies the values of the humanity. Super-ego is in everlasting struggle with the 'wild' instincts of the id. Thus, to cope oneself with the permanent conflicts between the id and the super-ego is via 'development of the ego' as ego functions as a harmonizing act between the two, 'id and super-go' adjusting the needs of the 'id' to the communal anticipations of the 'super-ego', (Anderson and Taylor, 2008: 92). Prufrock reveals his assumptions through presenting the damaged psyche of humanity. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' Eliot focuses on the speaker, (Prufrock), who wonders about eating the fruit, making a quick change, or to remain with the fortitude to keep living. This prevents the speaker from communicating with others.

Moreover, Eliot pays a special attention to the use of epigraph in many of his poems. It might not be logical to neglect the key function of the epigraph which is an insight into the core of the poem and it foreshadows the meaning of the poem. 'The Love Song', has borrowed the epigraph from Dante's 'Inferno'. This is because it is an integral part of the poem; its translation is as follows:

'If I believed my reply to be to someone who ever would return to the world, this flame would wag no more. But because, if what I hear be true no one ever does return alive from this depth, I reply to you without fear of infamy' (Ward 13).

There are various views about the speaker of the epigraph. For instance, he is led by fear that he acknowledges no one ever does return from the wrong. In addition, the human body which always works as the ego or the super-ego of human beings. Therefore, it is difficult to decide who the speaker of the lines from Dante's character Guido is; is it Prufrock or Eliot? An individual is certain that the words said in the epigraph refer to Prufrock's situation (Jain 34).

Ward David Further argues that the person who speaks is Guido who is put in hell for being attached to the materialistic world and rejecting the spiritual world. The speaker relates the factor behind speaking freely without any fear to his thought that no one can ever return to the real world from the hell, (Ward 13). Eliot's Prufrock is very much like Dante's Guido, who only told his story in hell to Dante as he thought that Dante will not return to the living people but he was not successful because Dante told his story to his readers 'When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall' (l. 59).

Concerning the identical situations of Dante with Guido and Eliot with Prufrock Jain says: 'Guido reveals his identity to Dante only because he mistakes Dante for one of the damned, like himself, for whom there is no escape from hell. It would therefore

follow that Prufrock's relationship to the author is similar to that of Guido to Dante', (34). Similarly, it is clear that Prufrock was only ready to tell his story because he thinks that Eliot was entrapped in the similar situation to that of himself and therefore, the poet might be empathising with him, keeping Prufrock's story secret, (Jain, 1991: 34). It is obvious that Prufrock's fear is so intense that he is not ready to tell his story to anyone except those who live in a similar situation like him. Mittal believes that Eliot has made his poetry intricate by borrowing from Dante's 'Inferno', (Mittal 14). Evidently, Eliot merely attempted to show the modern life which was similar to hell due to World War I. The epigraph is necessary because it simply elucidates the task of the reader by disseminating information about the source of the poets' ideas. This is a significant perspective that links the epigraph to the content of the poem, making it strong. In the absence of this aspect, the meaning of the poem would have remained vague. Nathan A. Cervo, States that Prufrock lives on earth, however, his situation is not better than Guido's who is in hell. Therefore, Prufrock in this bad condition does not intend to act like a fool to be laughed at 'Almost, at times, the Fool (l. 119).

The epigraphs of T.S. Eliot's poems are very significant though they are not part of the poem, but both the title and the epigraph are connotatively related to the content of the poem, therefore; they must not be ignored. The epigraph of Dante's 'Inferno' that was written in Italian mixes the levity of the 'The Love Song' (Williamson 57-58). Gillett Eric believes that the epigraph shows Eliot's viewpoint about life's uselessness and meaninglessness because of the inevitability of death. Modern humans are very pessimistic as they no longer think they can 'conquer death', and cannot control the universe according to their wills. Thus, through mentioning death in 'The Love Song' such as 'Lazarus symbol', modern humanity's activities cannot be useful in this regard (Gillett 1085). Similarly, Prufrock's continued return to the 'Women come and go, talking of Michelangelo' including his recurrent enquiries 'how should I presume' express the consciousness of a modern and neurotic individual.

A close focus on the poem denotes the role of the epigraph to the reader. It is important to take note of the roles portrayed in explaining T. S. Eliot's poems as Eliot has specially chooses them for his poems. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', the poet chooses some lines from the Italian poet, Dante's 'Inferno', to delve deep in the life of modern humanity. This is because one cannot perceive the meaning of the present moment sufficiently until he has some knowledge of life in the past.

Accordingly, Eliot brought the epigraph from 'Inferno' in Italian, to urge the readers to read not merely what was important in the past in modern human's own country but also in the other countries. Moreover, it is not only what was written in one's own language, but also what was written in the other languages. This is a very reliable justification for Eliot's critique of modern humanity for Eliot educated himself in different languages of the world. This ensures that direct acquisition of the various issues is well presented 'And time yet for a hundred indecisions' (l. 32). In addition, it enables comprehension of different cultures of the universe. Having knowledge and information about the other languages is one of the necessities of the modern world. This will be a cause for having a very developed country through benefitting from the past good in the past compared to the other precedent or later ages. This enables people to earlier precautions to avoid what was, and is evil in the modern period. The epigraph in 'The Love Song' can probably be called the title of the title because sometimes it is a direct insight into the content of the poem but the title might not be so. This is because of the various perspectives presented from the views build from the poem.

Guido, Prufrock and modern humans are anti-heroic, irreligious and secular because Guido did not do what God has ordered. Therefore, he was put into hell and he was afraid of his reputation to tell the truth but he mentioned it because he thought that the character (Dante) was stuck in hell, and could not go back to life to narrate Guido's story. However, he was not successful as Dante told his story to people through his poetry 'For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse' (l. 49). Prufrock in 'The Love Song', which has a pessimistic mood, might show his worry of his reputation as anti-heroic. Nevertheless, Prufrock tells readers about his worse situation in a hell like life, as he thinks that readers will not be able to tell other people who are not aware of his situation. The characteristics of Eliot's persona, Prufrock has previously been seen in Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress', as 'indecisive, incapable of vigorous decision of Marvell, or the conscious effort of Donne', (1973: 15-16). Prufrock is rather hesitant, doubtful, and indecisive because he is not a hero (l. 87). Marvell's poem is quite ironical to Eliot's 'The Love Song.' This follows the lines from Marvell's poem indicating his heroic style that one needs to gather all his power to be able to confront the difficulties that one might at any time face:

Let us roll our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,  
Through the iron gates of life.  
(‘ To his Coy Mistress’, ll. 41-44)

Michael, Grant, argues that Eliot’s early poems, of which "Prufrock" is one, mainly relied on the poet’s uncertainty. It shows Eliot’s talent, who was able to amalgamate two worlds; firstly the world where modern humans dwell in, and secondly the world of Dante’s Guido, (1982:3). ‘The Love Song’ is one of the modern poems that draw the attention of many critics to itself. In *The Columbia History of British Poetry*, it is argued that,

Eliot’s "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is considered by many critics as his first masterpiece. It is already, cinematic: image and juxtaposition. Prufrock is, however belatedly, one of Nietzsche’s nineteenth-century young men, his moral and religious spine broken by the say-so weight of history’, (1994: 569).

Eliot was able to delineate the picture of modern humanity by implementing imagery and making use of ‘juxtaposition’. It is obvious that Nietzsche’s men are secular and irreligious. This is denoted from limitation towards religion, thus entailing immorality. In addition, Prufrock is considered one of Nietzsche’s men, it implies that he shares their features, like, lack of religious belief and moral and seeks for the meaning of life through the perspective of history and philosophy.

## Conclusion

T.S. Eliot's "The Love of J. Alfred Prufrock" depicts and criticises modern man's fear, alienation and hesitaton. Eliot used the interior monologue to describe the intellectual state of the protagonist of the poem, Prufrock as a type of the modern man. Not surprisingly, after man being frustrated in this universe, he does not have the ability to change his fate or even to have any ambitions to keep on living in this life. Eliot, most of the time, shows how life is useless, void of any meaning. He keeps on looking for hope to get rid of the evils of life. Prufrock does believe that man can never be a prophet since he lacks the courage to face various aspects of life and since he is always afraid to express his hidden wishes and desires. He is only expressing his wishes through the interior monologue. Eliot means that man is afraid to shout and

call for his aspirations and needs .Why, because he fears to be laughed at, because he could not have the ability to face the ugliness and the emptiness of modern life.

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